Castlemaine Naturalist

July 2017

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Monthly newsletter of the Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.

Little Egret - photo Noel Young

Revisiting PhotoPoints

George Broadway led 12 members on the excursion on June 10 for a tour of nine sites where Ern Perkins had established PhotoPoints (PP). We started at Picnic Point on Lake Cairn Curran (not one of the sites, but usually a good birding spot), then tried to find the first PP along Boundary Rd, a view of Mt Moolort (Bald Hill) - but a key foreground dead tree was missing! (Back home, George found that the tree was missing in the last of Ern's photos, too – so we were at the right position). Much of the landscape was looking a healthy green; along the Baringhup Rd we noticed early flowering Golden Wattle. At Frogmore Swamp there were many birds, including a pair of well camouflaged Black-fronted Dotterel. Having failed to find one PP along Baringhup West Rd, we turned up Green Lane to the next one: a fine stand of Buloke trees, along with 3 distant Wedgies, Goldfinches and a Jacky Winter.

George could not photograph a repeat of the PP at Hamilton's Crossing, due to the many campers and their tents and vehicles enjoying this pleasant spot on the Lodden River – but there were honeyeaters, cockatoos and parrots. So we drove on to Lovelands Crossing, a delightful (unoccupied!) site for afternoon tea – and more birding – with the Lodden bubbling over rocks. After this welcome break, we drove down the quirkily named Mock Orange Lane, lined with Osage Oranges, and on to Bells Swamp, our final site. The swamp was drier than we had expected, but it provided the birding highlights for the afternoon: two Little Corellas, Grebes and a juvenile Nankeen Night Heron, feeding along a muddy shoreline, apparently oblivious to 12 birdwatchers and clicking cameras.

Thanks to George for a well-researched, long but rewarding afternoon,

visiting parts of the Moolort-Baringhup area that were new to several of us. Overall, it seemed that in this area, the landscapes and other features that Ern recorded have not changed dramatically, but detailed checks on the photographs taken over almost three decades will be worthwhile.

BIRDLIST: (+ means lots)

Bridge at Joyce's Creek: Darter, Welcome Swallow

Picnic Point: Australian Shelduck(3), Galah (4), White-plumed Honeyeater (6), Little Raven, Australian Magpie, Willy Wagtail (3), Superb Fairy-wren.

Frogmore Swamp: Pacific Black Duck (2), Long-billed Corella (2), Brown Falcon, Black-fronted Dotterel (2), White-plumed Honeyeater (+), White-naped Honeyeater, Red Wattlebird, Spotted Pardelote, Striated Pardelote (2), Yellow-rumped Thornbill (3), Willy Wagtail, Welcome Swallow.

Green Lane: Goldfinch (3), Wedge-tailed Eagle (3), Australian Magpie (8), Jacky Winter.

Dudley Lane: Eastern Rosella

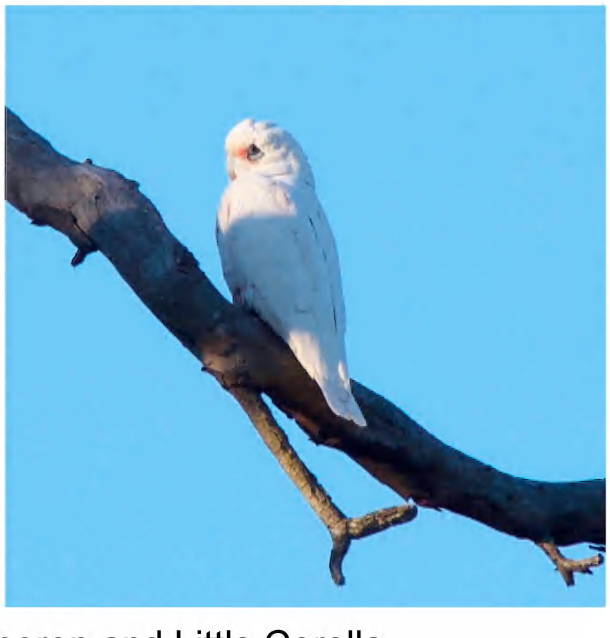
Hamilton's Crossing: Long-billed Corella (+), Sulphur-crested cockatoo (+), Musk Lorikeet, Fuscous and White-plumed Honeyeaters, Australian Raven, Australian Magpie.

Loveland's Crossing: White-plumed Honeyeater, Laughing Kookaburra, Brown Treecreeper, Willy Wagtail (2).

Mock Orange Lane: Crested Pigeon (3), Little Raven (3), Noisy Miner (2).

Bell's Swamp: Pacific Black Duck (+), Wood Duck (+), Australasian Grebe (2), Hoary-headed Grebe (2), Little Corella (2), Long-billed Corella (2), White-faced Heron, Juvenile Nankeen Night Heron, White-plumed Honeyeater (4), Superb Fairy Wren (2).

Peter Turner



Bells Swamp: juvenile Nankeen Night-heron and Little Corella

- photos by Peter Turner

The Photopoint Project

George Broadway

Following a talk by Alan Reid on monitoring changes, Ern decided that a useful club project would be to initiate a Photopoint project.

The idea was to take photographs of specific areas at intervals of 10 years or so in order to note any changes.

The initial sources were:-

Colour prints taken by members for the project

Photographs taken during the 90's roadside surveys. These were surveys done by club members during which the shire roads were assessed on their environmental values. In those days there were 4 shires which have now amalgamated into the Mount Alexander Shire. The Maldon Shire was the first to produce a detailed map showing roadside values.

Copies of photographs or slides previously taken by club members

Gwenda Beare's slides held by the Historical Society .

Golden Point Landcare.

Ern had written a lot about photograph storage in 1999. The State Library was to be sent one set, the other to be held by the Historical Society. This all predated digital photography, which has now revolutionised photograph storage.I am not aware of how much material was actually sent to the State Library.

In 1999 the club received a grant of $2655 for the project. This would pay for film, storage sleeves, slide copier, etc.

It was envisaged that members with cameras would engage with the project. As it turned out I believe most members were unsure of the procedure, so Ern took most of the photos himself.

The instructions were :-

1. Take photo (s)

2. Take photo of GPS unit showing degrees, minutes and seconds. Ern assumed that everyone would possess or have access to a GPS unit.

3. Take photo of notebook page showing Date, Location, Direction, any other.

Recently I have been experimenting with locating and retaking some of the photos although this is not really due for another 2 years. i.e. Ern's last pics were taken in 2010 so we should be looking at 2020. However I have found it interesting to track down some of the spots. To begin with I went out with my computer which had all the Photopoints in it from the CD. I found it difficult to locate using this method, especially was it difficult to see the computer screen out in the daylight. I tried covering it with a blanket.

I also hoped to use the GPS unit Ern had used, but Lesley informed me that it wasn't working very well.

Then a breakthrough. The Friends of Box-Ironbark put up on their website a shire road map showing all the roads named, but also with a cursor which pinpointed the exact location with coordinates. The only hitch was that the coordinates were given in decimals while Ern had used minutes and seconds. It needs a quick calculation to convert. So I can now pinpoint on the map exactly where the photos were taken. (And go to these spots as we did on Saturday) Another plus is that I recently discovered that my iphone has a built-in GPS unit. (with minutes and seconds)

Originally the photos were to be prints pasted on A4 sheets and kept in 3-ring binders. A database included names, location, photographer, film type, plants etc.

Ern notes that the Historical Society has one copy and he has (had) the other. I assume Lesley still has it. The material is also on a CD which is readily available.

We now have to decide where we go from here. I suggest that I maintain the copy I have on my computer as the master copy, which can be added to, as has already been done, by myself and others. At an appropriate time this could be made into a CD/DVD, of which several copies could be made, including one or more for the archives. The whole thing could also be added to our club website for the interest of members and others.

Above - Silkworm factory – left, March 1994, and right, on 16-6-2017

Above – Frogmore Swamp, left – 4-5-2010, and right - 16-6-2017

Nature Notes for July (1941)

George Broadway

What specimens were sent in to Crosbie Morrison, Editor of "Wildlife" magazine for identification in July 1941? At the time the war was still in Europe, Japan had not entered.

First up – Spiders:

It is interesting to note how often the same specimens keep coming up, did people not read previous issues ?

From Birchip: The Red-headed Trapdoor Spider, *Eriodon erythrocephalus*, Front part of body bright red, legs black and abdomen usually royal blue. Believed to be (in 1941) the male of the much larger black "Mouse Spider", In 1941 the relationship had not yet been proved.

St Kilda: A salmon pink spider, probably *Epeira* the most accomplished of the orb web spinners. Colour varies from buff to almost black.

Torquay: Spider with red front and black hind end would be the Red & Black Spider. *Nicodamus bicolour.* Quite harmless.

Another specimen which was red all over was a Velvety Red Earth Mite. Like a spider has 8 legs but lacks a constriction between thorax and abdomen.

A query about a "Cutting" grass, this was Marram Grass, *Ammophila arenaria*, introduced to stabilise sand dunes.

E. Malvern: Redback Spider, *Latrodectus hasselti,* Venomous

Edithvale: Nephila Satinback spider, not the Golden Orb but a smaller relative. Harmless.

Ormond, Nurcoung, E. Brunswick, and Turriff. All specimens of Bird-dropping Spider. *Celaenia excavata,* See earlier newsletters. Is frequently sent in.

Cheltenham: a small scorpion. Not entirely harmless, could inflict a painful sting.

Flowers:

Grong Grong (NSW) two different mistletoes on same tree. Unusual but not impossible. Both *Loranthus, L. linophyllus and L. quandong.* The first is normally found on She-oaks, the second on Eucalypts. Neither is found in this district.

Caulfield: Germinating seeds found in lemon. Similar occurrence noted in melon and tomato. (I have also noted in strawberries).

Fungi

Pakenham and Brighton: Two different specimens of "Stinkhorn Fungi" *Aseroe or*

Anthurus and a relative *Mutinus.*. Spores distributed by flies, attracted by the foul odour of the fruiting body.

Kalorama: Earth Star Fungus *Geaster*. 3 syllables and a soft "g". Actually a puff-ball raised on stilts.

Bentleigh: Basket Fungus which grows in a jelly-like ball below ground until the spores are ripe. Then it ruptures above ground and the basket-like structure rolls away distributing the spores.

Inverloch: Field mushroom, *Psalliota campestris* Large but still edible.

Insects

Fitzroy: Woolly Bear caterpillar, which would become a coachman moth with white wings and body marked with orange and black.

And Bulla: See previous newsletter.

Minyip: Giant Wood Moth. Lays eggs by broadcast in flight, caterpillars bore into roots.

Waratah (Tas) Also Barham: Looper Caterpillar. Larva of a small brilliantly marked moth. There are many species. (Unfortunately Mr Morrison does not identify the genus).

N.Fitzroy: Termites, do not attack living wood, therefore would not have killed the tree.

Regent: Butterfly was the "Imperial White" one of the mistletoe butterflies.

E. Geelong: Yes the Preying Mantis does catch and eat Honey-bees. The closely related stick insects however are vegetarians.

Moorabbin: Grub is the larva of Carpet Beetle *Anthrenus*, The beetle is a weevil. Both harmful. Keep food in tightly closed tins, spray a good insect spray inside drawers containing woollens, and round skirting boards.

Dimboola: Golden Chafer Beetle, feeds voraciously on gum and other leaves. A Lictor case-moth, always has one stick longer than the rest, reason not known.

Alphington: Marbled Gecko *Phyllodactylus marmoratus*, A great hunter of insects. Yours probably came from the country in a load of firewood.

From the business meeting

The committee welcomed two new recruits – Sue Albert and Dianne Thompson, and regrets the resignation of Cheryl Taylor.

Committee is endeavouring to arrange an alternative speaker for August as Damian Cook will not be available.

Bird Quiz

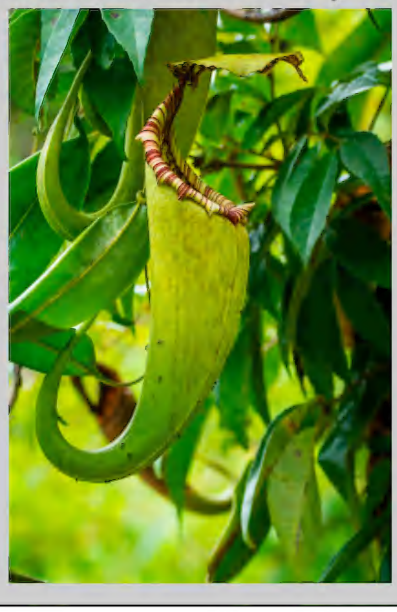
The bird featured last month was relatively easy, but not often seen in the Castlemaine area. It was the King Parrot. The male bird was shown, with the female has much less red and much more green. It is large for a parrot, in particular much stockier than most. As can be seen from the picture, the King Parrot can become relatively tame. It can be found in forests, generally in coastal regions, from Far North Queensland to the Victorian South Australia border. Castlemaine would certainly be on the edge of its distribution.

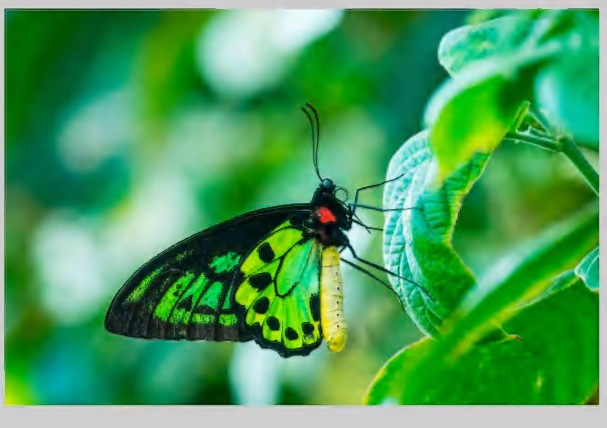
I will leave you with the bird for next month. - Nigel

This month our speaker will be Nigel Harland on the topic of

West Papua

I have been asked to write a brief summary of the talk which I will give at the next General Meeting. The subject is West Papua. Anne and I went on a trip there late last year and it was just magical. We were often up at 3am and getting to bed at 9pm. In between there were boat trips, 4WD rides up mountains to several thousand feet and walks along remote tracks – some more remote than others! Birds were generally hard to find with some remarkable exceptions. I gave up trying to take photos since my photographic skills were simply not good enough. However, I have been able to obtain some beautiful pictures taken by our tour guide. One of our travel companions was a guy from the UK who has seen nearly 9000 birds worldwide and even he managed to find over 60 new birds for his list – there are very few places in the world where he could do that. My list was much bigger, but the great company, fabulous scenery added to what was a fabulous trip. I am not going to show you the best photos here, you'll have to come along for that, but here is a taster. … Nigel





Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club

Castlemaine Field Naturalists
Coming events

Fri July 14 meeting: speaker Nigel Harland on West Papua

Sat July 15 field trip: quadrats related to fire history with Richard (tbc)

Fri August 11 meeting: speaker to be arranged

Sat August 19 Roadside clean-up

VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB ACTIVITIES

General meetings - (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 7.30 pm.

Field Trips - (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the car park opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and/or afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.

Business meetings - third Thursday of each month, except December, at George Broadways; 24a Greenhill Ave., at 6.00 pm. Members are invited to attend.

Club website (Web master: Chris Timewell) - http://castlemainefnc.wordpress.com/

Subscriptions for 2017
Ordinary membership: Single $30, Family $40
Pensioner or student: Single $25, Family $30
Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

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